

For Immediate Release: August 20, 2003

Contact: Contact: Kristin Pugh, Press Sec.; Chuck Kleeschulte 907/271-3735;
(202) 224-9301; 224-9306; H 301/283-4149

MURKOWSKI ANNOUNCES DETAILS ON HOW FISHERMEN CAN APPLY FOR FISHERMEN'S ASSISTANCE PROGRAM BENEFITS

ANCHORAGE - After conversations Tuesday with Bush Administration officials, Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski today released additional details on a new U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) program to provide financial assistance for Alaska salmon fishermen harmed by imports of farm-raised salmon.

"People need to understand this is now going to be a two-step process," said Murkowski. "The first and most immediately urgent step is to certify Alaska salmon fishermen as eligible for aid. That can most efficiently be done if a single non-government group, such as the United Fishermen of Alaska (UFA), submits a petition on behalf of all Alaska salmon fishermen. That needs to be done before the Aug. 31 deadline.

"If that is done on time and the petition is approved, as I expect it will, the second step will be for individuals to apply for actual grant aid. Individual fishermen will have more time to apply, beginning after certification of the petition occurs, which should be approximately October 1. Fishermen will then have a full 90 days to complete their applications. Given that many fishermen are currently still fishing, this process will be the most fair for all Alaska salmon fishermen," said Murkowski.

The new program, announced last week by Senator Murkowski, will allow salmon fishermen negatively affected by imports of farmed salmon to receive both technical assistance and financial grants under the Trade Adjustment Assistance for Farmers program authorized by last year's Trade Promotion Act. Senator Murkowski last week announced that her negotiations with the Administration succeeded in adding Alaska's fishermen to that program.

Details of the new program were formally published today in the Federal Register. Additional information is now available on the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) web site, at <http://www.fas.usda.gov/>, which will include forms both for the initial certification process and later for individuals to use to apply for the grant aid.

"If fishermen are to receive grants from money set aside for the current fiscal year (FY03), it's critical for the industry to submit an initial petition requesting certification for the salmon fishery in the next few days, so that the Secretary can make a decision before the fiscal year ends on Sept. 30th. That's why I'm encouraging a single group, such as UFA, to petition on everyone's behalf. I understand UFA is considering doing so," said the Senator. "Multiple petitions might simply slow down the approval process."

"Assuming the Secretary agrees that salmon fishermen generally are eligible, and that decision is made by Sept. 30, individual fishermen would then have up to 90 days to apply - as individuals - for assistance. Individual checks could then be issued as soon as January, 2004. If an industry petition is not filed in time for approval before September 30, it would be considered only for FY04 funding, and checks could not be issued before mid-2004," she said.

Because the program will continue beyond the current fiscal year, she said it makes sense for the salmon fishing industry to try to get certified both for FY03 and FY04. A separate petition will be required for FY04 funds, but can be filed by the industry any time before Dec. 31 for the aid for next year. Approval of the FY04 petition would allow additional funds to be distributed beginning approximately June 15 of next year, said Murkowski.

Under the program details, as unveiled this morning, Alaska salmon fishermen will be entitled to a per-pound adjustment equal to one-half the difference between (a) the national average price for the most recent marketing year (2002) and (b) 80 percent of the national average price for the preceding five years. Awards are capped, however, at a maximum of \$10,000.

For example, if the average price last year was \$0.50, and the five-year average was \$1.00, someone who harvested 50,000 pounds last year would receive aid of 15 cents per pound, or \$7,500. This is ½ of the \$0.30 difference between the \$0.50 average price and \$0.80 (80% of the five-year average price).

Murkowski also noted that if requests for assistance from both farmers and fishermen exceed the total available funding for the program of \$90 million a year, then grants will be prorated so that every applicant receives a fair amount. The exact amount of the checks for 2003 will not be known until early in 2004, after the application deadline closes.

Murkowski, who has been working for several months to include Alaska's fishermen in the TAA program originally designated only for farmers, said the program is an important step toward getting fishermen help to offset lost revenue because of declining salmon prices caused by competition from foreign pen-reared salmon.

"Alaska fishermen are farmers. Rather than grow crops in fields, they harvest our seafood crops from the seas. They clearly deserve the same aid that farmers receive when they face lower commodity prices because of foreign competition. I have been asking for such assistance for months. By this decision the Administration has understood and accepted our arguments and will treat Alaska's family fishermen the same way as family farmers," said Murkowski.

www.murkowski.senate.gov